DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 019 UD 023 601

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TITLE Parental Attitudes toward Language Learning and Bilingual Education.
INSTITUTION Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio, Tex.
PUB DATE May 84
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
JOURNAL CIT IDRA Newsletter; p1-2, 5-8 May 1984

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Language Attitudes; Mexican Americans; Minority Groups; Parent Associations; *Parent Attitudes; Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS *Bilingual School Advisory Committees

ABSTRACT

In spite of strong political and pedagogical reasons for the study of parental attitudes towards language and bilingual education, recent empirical studies have not adequately been examined by policymakers. Yet today, new theories on second language learning have provided a further impetus for attention to parental attitudes. In 1974, Rhodes articulated the popular beliefs (1) that many Mexican Americans are not in favor of bilingual education, and (2) that parents strongly believe that English should be taught as quickly as possible. However, the empirical findings of nine separate research projects (1969 through 1981) show favorable parent/community attitudes toward the inclusion of Spanish in school bilingual education programs. Rhodes's second comment is challenged by six separate research projects (1973 through 1979) which were based on Lambert's and Gardner's 1972 work; this attitude study identified two types of second language motivation--integrative reasoning and instrumental reasoning. Torres, in 1982, compared the attitudes of parents who were members of the bilingual school advisory committee (BSAC) with the attitudes of parents who had children in a bilingual program but were not actively involved in the BSAC. Findings suggest that bilingualism had a different economic weight for the middle class than it did for the lower class Chicano, and that an unintended consequence of the BSAC may be that it plays a strong role in contributing to effective schooling for the limited English proficient population. (KH)

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MAY 1984

PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARD LANGUAGE LEARNING AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

by María E. Torres, Ph.D.

Compelling political and pedagogical reasons exist for studying parental attitudes toward language and bilingual education. Citizens' opinions are an integral consideration taken into account by public policy makers, particularly in education. The field of bilingual education has been plagued with politics--sometimes less than responsible politics. Programs have become political footballs which have had to rely on "very favorable" conditions in order to ensure survival, making the chances of effective implementation a remote possibility. In spite of the political nature of the bilingual programs, the empirical studies on the attitudes of parents have not adequately been examined by policy makers.

Beyond the political considerations, new theories on second language learning have provided an impetus for renewed attention to be given to parental attitudes. Krashen (1981) focuses on two key concepts, (a) comprehensible input and (b) affective filter, in developing his theory of second language learning. Comprehensible input refers to an utterance or set of utterances in the second language provided to the learner using context, paralinguistics, and simplification of the language so that the focus is on the message rather than the form. For the discussion regarding parental attitudes the second concept is of most interest. Krashen (1981) describes the affective filter as:

> *. . . attitudinal factors that relate to second language acquisition that perform one or both of two functions. First, they will be factors that encourage intake . . . Second, . . . those that enable the performer to utilize the language heard for acquisition (p. 21).*

As the most likely primary caretaker of the child, the set of attitudes and values of the parent toward language is an important factor in the formulation of the child's perspective about language, language usage, and subsequently, the users of a language. It is within this framework that the study of parental attitudes derives its educational significance. To know the community attitudes about language better equips the school to plan curricular responses. Furthermore, the effectiveness of a bilingual education program may be affected by the attitudes of parents. For example, in comparing the Culver City Immersion Program with the Canadian French Immersion Program, Bratt Paulston (1980) describes the differences in parental support. Whereas the parents were completely supportive of the French Immersion Program, that was not true of the Culver City Program. This lack of support has been pointed out as a key factor in the limited success of the Culver City experiment. Thomas (1976) describes the linkage between parent attitudes and program effectiveness in the following way.

> *Parental attitudes not only help determine the success of the program, but are predictors of students' academic success. Kimbell (sic) (1968) determined that parental attitudes influence academic achievement among Mexican American students. He found that parents' educational aspirations for their children are predictors of achievement . . . Consequently, if parents may influence the children's success in a bilingual society, their attitude may influence the children's success in a bilingual program. Conversely, if the children sense that their parents are not in favor of this type of program, the children may reflect these same attitudes (p. 46).*

In summary, there are both political and pedagogical reasons for the theoretical and empirical study of parental attitudes towards language and bilingual education. This article (1) reviews the existing literature on parent attitudes toward language within the context of bilingual education, and (2) reports on a section of an NIE funded study on parent participation (Torres, 1982) which compared the attitudes of parents who were members of the bilingual school advisory committee (BSAC), a Title VII mandated advisory committee, with the attitudes of those parents who had children in the program but were not actively involved in the BSAC.

Attitudes of Parents/Community

Rhodes (1974) articulated a popular belief that there are many Mexican Americans who are not in favor of bilingual education and that parents strongly believe that English should be taught as quickly as possible. However, the empirical evidence on parent/community attitudes toward bilingual education indicates at least part of the statement as utterly false. Empirical findings show favorable attitudes toward the inclusion of Spanish in the school as part of the bilingual education program. In studies of parents with children in bilingual education, Valencia (1969) and Cruz (1977) reported favorable attitudes toward the use of Spanish in the bilingual

cont. pg. 2

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Parental Attitudes

cont. from pg. 1

program. Carrillo (1973) compared the Spanish-surname and Anglo families in the school district studies and found that they are both favorable toward the use of Spanish in the school. Carrillo (1973) also found age to be related to attitudes of parents toward bilingual education. Wesley (1973) and deNechochea (1978) surveyed parents from bilingual communities who did not necessarily have children in the bilingual program. Their findings were also positive toward the use of Spanish in the bilingual program. Finally, the most recent and extensive survey of 903 persons of Mexican American/Mexican origin in San Antonio, Texas and in East Los Angeles, California (SWVREP, 1982) found that, "93.1% of the Mexican origin population in San Antonio and 81.6% in East Los Angeles agreed that it was a good idea to have bilingual education in the schools" (p. 2).

Ogletree and Walker (1980) found that parents with children in bilingual education had greater knowledge of and more positive attitudes toward the use of the native language in the classroom than parents who did not have children in the program but were from the same language background. Cruz (1977) surveyed Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Cuban parents. He found more positive perceptions among individuals characterized by low socioeconomic status, low educational attainment, and low English fluency level, while Sutherland (1975) found the opposite. Sutherland (1975) found stronger positive attitudes toward bilingual education were held by individuals from higher socioeconomic status and educational levels. Peñalosa (1981) believes that this phenomena may be explained by accounting for generations within the United States. He believes that positive attitudes may arise among the recent arrivals because of their need for English and that the second generation within the United States may perceive bilingual education as political power, and thus, have positive attitudes.

Another segment of the research on language attitudes helps explain the second portion of the Rhodes comment, i.e., the parents strongly believe that English should be taught as quickly as possible. This research focuses on the orientation of the parents in bilingual education toward the first and second language learning process. The research is based on Lambert & Gardner's (1972) studies on attitudes and motivation of second language learning.

Lambert & Gardner (1972) found that the learning of a second language is related to the individual's motivation or reason for learning the language. They identify two types of motivations: integrative reasoning and instrumental reasoning. The integrative motivation refers to social reasons, e.g., wanting to be part of the society of speakers of the second language. The second type of reasoning refers to economic factors, e.g., wanting to get a better job. The research evidence indicates that parents of children in bilingual education programs have integrative reasons for wanting their children to learn Spanish (Adorno, 1973; Cohen, 1975). Most of the parents want their children to maintain Spanish and to be able to converse with their family members. The fact that parents favor their children learning Spanish or that they favor bilingual education does not prevent them from recognizing and strongly insisting that their children master English. Living in a country where the educational, political, and economic life is conducted largely in English, the mastery of the English language offers the possibility of a better station in life than the one the parents hold. Adorno (1973) and Cohen (1975) both found that the parents with children in the bilingual education program primarily had instrumental motivations for their children with respect to English language learning.

Two studies compared the perceptions of both parents and school personnel. Bixler-Marquez (1978) found that parents preferred a bilingual program that had as a social goal the maintenance of the Spanish language. The educators, who were also of Mexican origin, were divided in their belief as to whether such a social goal should be part of the bilingual education. Baca de McNicholas (1977) found that there was no significant difference between the two groups' perceptions towards language or culture, but they differ with respect to instruction. Habteyes (1979) and Matuti-Bianchi (1979) suggest that the bilingual advisory committee members are hand-picked by the school administrators and that they are "status quo" in orientation.

Previous studies, thus, suggest that age, socioeconomic status, and generation may be associated with parental attitudes toward bilingual education. These characteristics were taken into account in the study reported within (Torres, 1982). The previous research studies reported the main orientation of parents toward the native and second language learning. This study examined not only the main orientation towards the native and second language learning, but also the relative position each orientation had with respect to each of the two languages. In other words, does the fact that parents have a strong instrumental reason for learning English mean that they have a weak integrative orientation? Does the fact that parents have a strong integrative reason for learning Spanish mean that they have a weak instrumental

cont. pg. 5

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Parental Attitudes

cont. from pg. 2

orientation? Finally, this article compares the orientation of the BSAC members with the non-BSAC parents and the school principal to explore the "status quo" orientation theory.

Methodology

Parent sample. The sample included 149 parents with children in Spanish-English bilingual education classes from 14 elementary schools in San Jose, California. The parent population was divided according to participants and non-participants in the BSAC. Parents attending a simple majority of the regularly scheduled meetings of the BSAC were considered participants. Thus, if the BSAC had three regular meetings and a parent had attended two meetings the individual would be considered a participant. The total number of respondents included 41 BSAC participants and 108 non-participants.

Instrument. This study utilized a structured personal interview schedule developed by the author to elicit information on the attitudes and behaviors of Chicano parents with children in bilingual education classes. The test-retest reliability coefficient was employed to obtain a coefficient of stability (Pearson Product-Moment Correlation). The results verified that the questionnaire was reasonably reliable. For further technical information of design and methodology refer to Torres (1982).

Results

Language learning motivation. Statements have been made by both researchers and practitioners to the effect that parents involved in bilingual education programs do so primarily because they are interested in maintaining their children's heritage. An implication is that parents are interested in English beyond the economic benefits which may be derived from its mastery. Another implication is that parents do not see beyond self-perpetuation of maintenance in the case of Spanish. Lopez (1977) suggests that for lower socioeconomic status Chicanos, competence in two languages makes a difference in access to employment, thus, a more positive attitude toward Spanish in any instrumental sense. Another notion about the attitudes of parents involved in the BSAC is that they tend to agree with school administrators more than with the parent population of the bilingual education program. In other words, the parents serving on the committee are specifically selected by schools with the intent of maintaining the "status quo."

If these assumptions are operating, it would be expected that (a) BSAC parents would have higher integrative (social) reasons for learning Spanish when compared to the non-BSAC respondents, (b) BSAC parents would have higher instrumental reasons for learning English when compared to the non-BSAC, and (c) BSAC parents' attitudes would be more likely to agree with the school principals' language learning attitudes than with the non-BSAC.

Parents were asked to rank six reasons for learning Spanish. Three responses reflected integrative reasoning and three reflected instrumental reasoning. The most important reason for learning Spanish for the three groups (BSAC, non-BSAC, and school principal) was the same integrative reason, that is, "to maintain the culture and heritage." When asked to rank the reason for learning English, the most important reason for the BSAC members was "to help their children get a better job," and for the non-BSAC parents and the school principal the reason ranked most important was "to help their child get a better education." In both cases the reasons were instrumental for learning English. This initial analysis would seem to provide evidence for the claims made about the attitudes of BSAC and non-BSAC parents being economic in nature with respect to the learning of English and social with respect to the learning in Spanish in the school. However, the BSAC parents did not differ from non-BSAC parents in their motivations for learning either language. Furthermore, the non-BSAC parents responded more like the school principals than the BSAC.

The data was analyzed utilizing a two-factor analysis of variance with repeated measures on one factor. The objective was to examine whether differences in responses existed between the role groups (BSAC, non-BSAC, and principal) and whether the differences in the responses could be distinguished given the integrative/instrumental dichotomy. The latter would permit us to determine whether the attitudes towards the learning of Spanish or English favor social or economic motives.

With respect to the Spanish, no statistically significant differences were found. In other words, BSAC members and school principals believe that it is important to learn Spanish for its economic value as well as for social reasons. No statistically significant difference was found between groups. That is, BSAC members did not differ from non-BSAC respondents nor principals in their reasons for children to learn Spanish in school.

With respect to English, there were no statistically significant differences between the BSAC members, the non-BSAC respondents and the school principals in their reasons for learning English. However, analysis of the variance in responses indicated that a dichotomy exists between instrumental and integrative motivation. That is, the motivation for learning English was clearly instrumental for the population in this study.

Attitudes toward bilingual education. Parents with children in bilingual education have been found to have greater knowledge and more positive attitudes toward the use of the native language in the process of instruction than parents who did not have children in the bilingual program but were from the same language groups (Ogletree & Walker, 1980. However, the relationship between strong positive attitudes toward bilingual education and levels of participation has not been explored. In this study, it was anticipated that parents with stronger convictions of the value and use of the home language and culture in the school would also most likely be the individuals who participate in the BSAC.

Both the BSAC and the non-BSAC respondents felt very strongly about the need for schools to emphasize the

cont. pg. 6

cont. from pg. 5

culture of the child in developing instructional programs. The difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. The BSAC parents felt stronger about the need for the school to recognize the home language than the non-BSAC respondents. The difference was significant at a .05 level. The BSAC members also felt stronger about the use of the home language as a teaching tool when they were compared to the non-BSAC respondents, but the differences were not statistically significant.

On the other hand, the non-BSAC respondents felt stronger about the development of literacy skills through the bilingual education program in Spanish than the BSAC respondents did, but the difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level. Furthermore, the non-BSAC members (38.1%) felt strongly about the need to teach math and science in Spanish in comparison to the BSAC members (26.8%).

Six additional items were treated in a different way. The respondents were asked to choose between two alternatives. The issues were (a) the grade level in which Spanish should be used, (b) the continuation of Spanish when the child has learned English, and (c) the Spanish dialect to be taught in school.

The non-BSAC parents felt stronger than the BSAC members about the use of Spanish in the primary grades (67% to 63.4%). The difference was not statistically significant. The non-BSAC parents also felt stronger about the use of Spanish from the primary school level through secondary school, with 56.1% strongly agreeing as compared to the 52.5% of the BSAC. There was no statistically significant difference found. When the parents were asked to choose between the use of Spanish at the primary level only or throughout elementary to high school, the patterns were clearer. The BSAC members preferred the use of Spanish through high school at a rate of 56.4% whereas the non-BSAC respondents preferred that the use of Spanish be limited to the primary grades only. The differences were not statistically significant at the .05 level.

More non-BSAC parents (38.5%) strongly disagreed with the discontinuation of Spanish once the child learned sufficient English to be taught in it. The BSAC parents disagreed with the discontinuation of Spanish slightly less (35%). The BSAC members did not feel as strongly about the continuation of Spanish as a subject as the non-BSAC member, 12.2% and 15.2% respectively. When they chose between the discontinuation of Spanish or its continuation as a subject once the child had learned enough English, the non-BSAC members overwhelmingly chose the continuation of Spanish (95.1%) whereas the BSAC members did not feel as strongly (78.4%). The differences were statistically significant at the .05 level.

With respect to the variety of Spanish to be taught in school, 42.3% of the non-BSAC population and 34.1% of the BSAC population strongly believed that the standard Spanish dialect should be used in the school. The Spanish of the neighborhood was not endorsed as strongly by either group but more non-BSAC respondents (14.1%) strongly agreed than the BSAC members (12.2%). When they chose between the two, 64.1% of the BSAC members felt the standard dialect of Spanish should be used as opposed to the neighborhood Spanish. Slightly less (59.4%) non-BSAC members preferred the standard variety over the neighborhood Spanish. The differences were not statistically significant.

Only two of the items on bilingual education were found to be associated to BSAC participation, that is, the recognition of the home language in the school and the continuation/discontinuation of Spanish. It does not appear that participation is strongly associated with attitudes toward bilingual education.

Characteristics of respondents. The three intervening variables identified in the literature (i.e., age, socio-economic status, and generation) were examined. No statistically significant relationship was found between the BSAC and non-BSAC respondents with respect to any of the variables examined.

Conclusions

The results of this study show that Chicano parents with children in the bilingual education program hold positive attitudes towards bilingual education. This refutes the first part of Rhodes' (1974) comment that "many Mexican Americans are not in favor of bilingual education." Furthermore, a more basic assumption embedded in Rhodes' (1974) results was tested and rejected by this study.

An underlying assumption in Rhodes' comment was that a positive view of bilingual education precludes a strong belief that English should be taught as quickly as possible or vice-versa. The assumption that these two sets of values are mutually exclusive was tested by examining language learning motivation for English as well as Spanish. The results showed that both parents and school principals felt that English should be taught because of the economic benefits derived as a consequence of knowing English in the United States. They felt that there were both social and economic reasons for learning Spanish.

The latter findings suggests the complexity of values associated with language learning and bilingual education in that these value sets cannot be treated as mutually exclusive. It further suggests that a change in attitudes may be taking place. Previously, the home language was referred to as the language of social intimacy. However, its use as a medium of instruction in the school, the inclusion of bilingualism as a criterion for employment, and the recognition of its international value may provide a basis for an expanded perspective.

A correlate relates to whom is changing attitudes about the value of Spanish. The majority of the parents were from lower social class positions. Previously, positive views of bilingualism were associated with lower class status because of the employment strategies of this group in utilizing both English and Spanish employment networks (Lopez, 1977). The middle class Chicano relied on a more bureaucratic form of employment strategies

cont. pg. 7

Parental Attitudes

cont. from pg. 6

and, thus, bilingualism did not have the same economic weight for the middle class as it did for the lower class Chicano.

The finding that parents did not differ from the school principals suggests that a change in value toward Spanish may be occuring among the middle class population, at least among those associated with schools. The finding further suggests that schools and communities may be beginning to close the gap with respect to attitudes related to bilingual education and language learning. The rationale for this change needs further study. However, if attitudes do play a role in linking the home and the school, and if parental attitudes play a role in LEP student attitudes toward school and academic achievement, an unintended consequence of the BSAC may be that it plays a strong role in contributing toward effective schooling for the limited English proficient population. Needless to say, further study is needed to confirm this relationship.

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cont. pg. 8

Parental Attitudes

cont. from pg. 7

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